

March 9, 2004

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the member organizations of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), a coalition representing over 100 national organizations committed to improving the quality of life experienced by people with disabilities and their families, we urge your leadership in maintaining and improving the services and supports provided to citizens with disabilities across our Nation. While we recognize that there are many fiscal challenges facing you and your colleagues, we seek your support for critical funding increases in order to begin to meet the unmet needs for health, education, housing, vocational and other support services for citizens with disabilities and their families.

Please find attached a chart outlining our recommended funding levels for programs critical in supporting the independence, productivity, and connection of people with disabilities with their community. At a time when the safety net for supports is under attack in nearly every state, children and adults with disabilities are especially vulnerable. Therefore, we urge you to prioritize support for current, effective programs that serve individuals with disabilities.

The cost related to not prioritizing programs for people with disabilities is excessive. Without this initial investment, over time there is greater dependence on federal programs. At the same time, federal funding has yet to rise to the level necessary to fully address unmet need. People with disabilities of all ages continue to experience basic needs in education, employment services, health care, and housing that disability programs simply do not reach. For example:

- Uneven access to early intervention, special education and related services – one-half of the states are not serving the targeted number of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.
- Shortage of quality child care options – only 27 percent of children eligible for federal child care assistance receive it.
- High unemployment – 68 percent of working age people with disabilities are unemployed, yet only 5 percent of adults who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services are actually able to access such services.
- Inadequate health care and insurance coverage – 42.6 million uninsured Americans, including nearly eight million people with disabilities; 28 percent of people with disabilities report having health care needs that are not covered by their insurance plans.
- Limited access to services in home and community settings – states report waiting lists of thousands of older adults and persons with disabilities who want to move from institutions to the community, but must wait years to do so.
- Nearly 80% of young people in the juvenile justice system have a mental disorder.

Please feel free to contact us at any time, if you have questions or need additional information. Thank you for all you do to ensure that America *is* a land of opportunity for *all* of its citizens. For more information please contact the co-chairs of the CCD Fiscal Policy Task Force, Donna Meltzer, AUCD (301) 588-8252 or Julie Ward Epilepsy Foundation (301) 459-3700.